

**COMMENTS – *Opinion* - In January 2001, the Mulberry Corp. informed the Department of Environmental Protection that it was undergoing financial difficulties and was unable to provide environmental security at its two phosphate mining locations, one at Piney Point. Mulberry walked away leaving a ticking environmental time bomb.**

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**Agencies failing to protect us  
CAPT. ERIC SCHMIDT**

In January 2001, the Mulberry Corp. informed the Department of Environmental Protection that it was undergoing financial difficulties and was unable to provide environmental security at its two phosphate mining locations, one at Piney Point. Mulberry walked away leaving a ticking environmental time bomb.

The Environmental Protection Agency in April issued an emergency dumping permit for the dispersal of treated wastewater from Piney Point into the Gulf of Mexico starting 40 miles off the coast of Sarasota. With this news, a group of concerned fishermen, divers and spongers formed a coalition to try to move this dumping farther out into the Gulf of Mexico. The original 40 mile starting point for wastewater discharge was very close to the Madison-Swanson reserve site, an area which has been determined to be gag grouper spawning sites and closed to all bottom fishing four years ago.

Our coalition determined that it would be best to disperse the water into the loop currents of the Gulf of Mexico. DEP finally conceded to start the dumping in a depth of water starting around 600 feet. While we do not condone this activity and hope in the future that this will never have to happen again, the treated water is far offshore and staying away from the West Florida coast. Current satellite images clearly show the “river” of wastewater mixed with runoff from the Mississippi River along the west coast and into the Gulf Stream. I could only imagine what would be the case if the dumping had been allowed to occur at the original 40-mile mark.

We understood the problems associated with doing nothing. If the dikes had failed, human health and safety would have been compromised and a catastrophic release of wastewater into Bishops Harbor and Tampa Bay would have occurred.

At a recent Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council meeting in Naples, a representative from the EPA told the council that more than a dozen other sites in Florida like Piney Point will require cleanup.

Why are the EPA and DEP allowing such reckless behavior from these companies? Companies make their money and then walk away, forcing the taxpayers to pay for cleanup, and now, turning the Gulf of Mexico into a garbage dump. These corporations need to be held accountable. Make them post environmental bonds to guarantee cleanup and not place it on the backs of taxpayers; \$130 million for Piney Point alone. This



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dumping sets a precedent; we don't want to see it happen again. Let your elected representatives know we do not tolerate this behavior and to push for reforms to make these companies accountable.